DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 061 IR 054 282

AUTHOR	Brandhorst, Ted, Ed.
TITLE	Abstracting/Annotating. ERIC Processing Manual, Section VI.
INSTITUTION	ARC Professional Services Group, Rockville, MD. Information Systems Div.; Educational Resources Information Center (ED), Washington, DC.; ERIC Processing and Reference Facility, Rockville, MD.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	92
CONTRACT	RI89002001
NOTE	44p.; Supersedes previous edition ED 219 087. Loose-leaf, updated continuously. Section 6 of the ERIC Processing Manual (IR 054 276).
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Processing and Reference Facility, 1301 Piccard Drive, Rockville, MD 20850-4305 ($7.50).
PUB TYPE	Guides - General (050) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071) -- Reference Materials - General (130)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Abstracting; Databases; Information Retrieval; Information Storage; Library Technical Processes; *Technical Writing
IDENTIFIERS	*ERIC

ABSTRACT

Rules and guidelines are provided for the preparation of abstracts and annotations for documents and journal articles entering the ERIC database. Various types of abstracts are defined, including the Informative, Indicative, and mixed Informative-Indicative. Advice is given on how to select the abstract type appropriate for the particular document. The content of a good abstract is covered under such headings as Subject Matter, Purposes, Author's Viewpoint, Intended Audience, Relationship to Other Works, Intended Use, Special Features, Results or Findings. Detailed rules are provided for the composition of an abstract, covering such topics as Length, Voice, Tense, Abbreviations and Acronyms, Lists, Numbers, etc. Certain kinds of documents present special abstracting problems and these are treated under the following headings: Reports (Research and Technical); Speeches/Presentations; Curriculum Guides; Program Descriptions; Textbooks; Bibliographies; Multiple-Author Works; Tests. Journal article annotations are distinguished from document abstracts and the special rules covering annotations are described. (WTB)

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ERIC

Processing Manual

Rules and Guidelines for the Acquisition, Selection, and Technical Processing of Documents and Journal Articles by the Various Components of the ERIC Network

Section VI: Abstracting/Annotating

June 1992

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
U.S. Department of Education

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Summary of Significant Rules

1. An abstract must be written (or extracted) for *all* documents announced in RIE. An annotation must be written for all articles announced in CIJE that do not have expository titles, and is highly recommended for all other articles.

2. All abstracts and annotations must be in the English language.

3. Abstracts should be of the *informative* type whenever possible. Certain documents, because of their organization (e.g., conference proceedings, textbooks, etc.) or topic (e.g., compilations of laws, bibliographies, etc.), are not amenable to this approach and require *indicative* abstracts. Annotations, because of their restricted length, are usually indicative. Mixed informative/indicative abstracts may also be appropriate, but care must be taken to make it clear at all times whether the viewpoint being expressed is that of the author or the abstractor.

4. Abstracts should be restricted in length to one paragraph of approximately 200 words. "Table of Contents" type abstracts may go to approximately 300 words. Annotations should be restricted in length to approximately 50 words.

5. The conventional and accepted rules for good writing and good abstracting practice and style should be followed, e.g.,

   a. Brevity and clarity are essential.

   b. Abstracts (but not annotations) should have the same relative emphases as the document.

   c. Abbreviations should not be used.

   d. Acronyms should be accompanied by the spelled-out version, at least the first time they are used..

   e. Repetition of the title, or other information already contained in the descriptive cataloging, should generally be avoided.

   f. The abstractor should remain objective and avoid introducing personal prejudices.

   g. Evaluative language, comparisons of companies or commercial products, and derogatory comments concerning any person or organization should not be included, unless they are clearly identified as the author's.

   h. The distinction between author statements and abstractor statements should always be clear.

   i. Abstracts should be written in complete sentences. Annotations may employ telegraphic sentences.

6. Author abstracts should be used if they are judged adequate to convey the content of the item. Author abstracts will not and need not comply with exactly the same standards that an ERIC abstractor, writing a completely new abstract, should follow.

7. Abstracts are identified as to their authorship by putting in parentheses at the end either the word "(Author)", the initials of the ERIC abstractor, e.g., "(JS)", or, for a modified abstract, a combination of the two, e.g., "(Author/JS)".

VI. ABSTRACTING/ANNOTATING

This Section contains the rules and guidelines governing the preparation of the narrative text that is entered in the "Abstract" data field (ABST_) of the ERIC database.

The content of this field varies markedly in ERIC between document records and journal article records. Document records (for *Resources in Education* (RIE)) contain a 200-word full abstract. Journal article records (for *Current Index to Journals in Education* (CIJE)) contain a brief 50-word annotation. Both abstracts and annotations are discussed in this Section.

Individuals learning the abstracting process are encouraged to use both this Section and the separately published *ERIC Abstractor/Indexer Workbook*. This workbook was created by experienced ERIC abstractors specifically as a training manual and contains many more actual abstract examples than can be included here.

NOTE: When the word "Abstract" or "Annotation" is used in this Section, it is understood to refer to an "ERIC" abstract or annotation (i.e., the word "ERIC" has not been endlessly repeated, but must be assumed). The rules and guidelines promulgated here, while based on general standards for abstracts/annotations, have, nevertheless, been tailored to ERIC's specific needs.

A. Definition and Function of an Abstract

An abstract is an abbreviated representation of a document, without added interpretation or criticism. An abstractor must take a larger work, find its essence, and represent it concisely and accurately, without injecting the abstractor's personal biases. The minimum requirement of every abstract is a statement of the subject and scope of the document, giving sufficient information to enable users to decide if the original document is suited to their needs.

Dictionaries tend to equate an abstract with a summary, synopsis, digest, condensation, or précis. One authority defines it as a *"...terse presentation in (as far as possible) the author's own language, of all the points made, in the same order as in the original piece of primary documentary information."*

1. Informative Abstract

An *informative* abstract is a condensed version of the essential ideas of a document. It contains a statement, from the viewpoint of the author, of the thesis, development or proof, and conclusions. In short, it states what the document actually says, and attempts, insofar as possible, to be a substitute or stand-in for the original. The abstractor should not editorialize, include personal opinions, or otherwise intrude, either explicitly or implicitly. The major and minor points presented by the author should be presented in the abstract with the same emphases as in the document, so that the author's thoughts may be accurately represented. In order to accomplish this, the abstractor must read as much of the document as is necessary to understand its subject content and purpose. Illustrative examples are provided below.

The following abstract is of a program/project report. It was written as an informative abstract in order to give the reader the maximum amount of information about the program. This is a readable, useful statement providing the essence of the report.

ABST_The 1991 Summer Youth Employment Program, sponsored by the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, included 596 youngsters, of whom 377 belonged to the Neighborhood Youth Corps, 130 were economically disadvantaged, and 48 were American Indian students employed by the base. A wide range of government, industrial, and educational institutions supported this vocational development program by providing funds, practicum counselors, vocational counselors, school buses, and other services. The work experience proved highly successful, due to the encouragement of the work-coordinators and counselors and the use of such techniques as resource speakers, peer tutoring, a refresher course in typing, and drug education instruction. Special education students were included in this program, which was evaluated by means of questionnaires for supervisors. (AA)

FIGURE VI-1: Informative Abstract of a Program/Project Report

The following abstract of a paper is faithful to the author's point of view. To write *"The author says..."* at the beginning of the abstract would add nothing to it (except to make a reader think that any abstract without those words in it was not quite faithful to the author) and to insert those three words in the middle of the abstract would surely confuse a reader.

ABST_Negative preconceptions about the disadvantaged often hinder the effectiveness of teachers and administrators in schools in economically depressed areas. Most disadvantaged children are not special discipline problems, nor are they hostile or unresponsive. They and their parents have high, even unrealistic, educational aspirations. Teachers should encourage in the children the self-discipline that leads to academic success, which, in turn, would break the self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. (AA)

FIGURE VI-2: Informative Abstract Written from the Author's Viewpoint

The following abstract is an example of a coherent, unified paragraph showing clearly the order of the argument in the original. Transitional words help the reader to follow the line of development.

ABST_The teacher and the school system serve as the key mediators in the acculturation of students from different cultures. However, the teacher's commitment to the ethic of work and competition, to a future-oriented value system, and to the concept of a father-dominated nuclear family structure often tends to alienate teacher from student. As a result, many minority children, whose culture is different from that of the teacher, may never acquire the tools for full acculturation. Alienation between student and teacher may be further reinforced by the child's concept of the teacher as a success in a hostile culture and by the teacher's materialistic motivation for choosing a profession. Moreover, the educator's opportunity for a personal, individual evaluation of students is often limited by administrative prescriptions. Several important steps in teacher education can assure a more successful cultural bridge between student and school personnel. The staff should understand and accept the presence of cultural diversity in their school and initiate measures for parent cooperation and student participation in programs for developing skills and raising the aspiration level. Teachers should also exhibit flexibility in recognizing and rewarding evidences of nonverbal achievement. (AA)

FIGURE VI-3: Informative Abstract Maintaining the Order of the Argument of the Original Document

2. Indicative Abstract

An *indicative* abstract is a description of or guide to the content and format of the document, written from the viewpoint of an informed but impartial and objective reader. The indicative abstract reports broadly what is discussed or included in the document, in what manner the information is presented, and, if necessary, to whom the document is addressed. An indicative abstract indicates to the reader what kinds of information can be found in the document, but does not include this information. The reader is directed to the document itself for substantive details. The abstractor may obtain sufficient information to write an indicative abstract by examining the Table of Contents, Foreword, Introduction, Summary, etc., or by scanning the text without reading it in depth. Illustrative examples are provided below.

The following abstract of a bibliography gives the reader all the information likely to be needed about the content of the document. Such words as *"emphasis on"* and *"the major portion"* suggest the document's proportions and therefore its potential usefulness.

ABST_Eight hundred and nine books and articles published between 1885 and 1992 are listed in this bibliography for students of applied German linguistics at the graduate and undergraduate levels and teachers of German in high schools and colleges. Though the emphasis is on applied linguistics, some publications on linguistic theory are included. The major portion of the bibliography is devoted to works on morphology and syntax, with additional sections on general language and linguistics, phonetics and phonemics, prosodic features, linguistics and the teaching of foreign languages, and language changes in German since 1945 (especially the increased use of English words). The entries are cross-referenced and some are annotated for clarification of content. An author index and a list of the abbreviations used for titles of scholarly journals are also provided. (AA)

FIGURE VI-4: Indicative Abstract of a Bibliography

The following abstract of a report on a summer institute illustrates how an indicative abstract may be used to reflect the same *emphasis* as the original. Although there are enumerations and lists, repetitive introductory sentences have been avoided, every sentence does not end with *"...is included,"* and there is no monotony of sentence structure.

ABST_The narrative portion of this report describes a specially designed summer institute for state foreign language supervisors held at Indiana University. It summarizes activities undertaken in the six principal areas of the curriculum: (1) statistics; (2) experimental design and research; (3) linguistics; (4) supervision and curriculum development; (5) psychology and professional resources; and (6) instruction in French, German, and Spanish. The report also presents the results of the evaluation made by participants at the conclusion of the institute. The information contained in the appendixes, amounting to more than one-half of the report, includes the forms used in conducting the institute, a directory of participants and staff, the schedule of special events, the institute calendar, lecture outlines, student and faculty evaluation questionnaires, bibliographies, and a list of the materials available to participants. (AA)

FIGURE VI-5: Indicative Abstract Maintaining Relative Emphases of Original Document

The abstract below is for an article containing primarily *tables and statistical data.* It is a readable abstract, indicating what statistical data are present without actually giving detailed figures. In communicating the main trend revealed by the data, the abstract moves toward the informative.

ABST_This statistical survey presents tables showing the number of students studying French, Spanish, German, or Latin in domestic secondary schools during each school year from 1958-59 to 1991-1992, the percentage studying each language in relation to the total high school population, and the percentage studying Latin in relation to the total foreign language enrollment. The data reveal a continuous decline in the study of Latin in high schools, as compared with the study of the other three languages, and point to, among other things, a lack of understanding among students, educators, and parents of the cultural value of classical studies for the English-speaking student. The kind of nationwide 'public relations' program that the Modern Language Association (MLA) launched in 1952 (to promote modern foreign language study) is recommended on behalf of classical language study. (AA)

FIGURE VI-6: Abstract of Document Involving Numerous Statistical Tables and Their Interpretation

3. Informative-Indicative Abstract

Ideally, an abstract should be either *informative* or *indicative*. Switching back and forth within one abstract, from a direct transmission of the author's ideas, to the style of an indicative abstract (using the point of view of the abstractor), can confuse the user. It is not always possible to achieve this ideal, however. The structure of certain documents may require a mix of the two styles. ANSI Standard Z39.14, "Writing Abstracts," states this principle as follows:

> *"A combined informative-indicative abstract must often be prepared when limitations on the length of the abstract and the style of the document make it necessary to confine informative statements to the primary elements of the document and to relegate other aspects to indicative statements."*

This same standard recommends making abstracts *"...as informative as is permitted by the type and style of the document."* If a mixed informative-indicative abstract is written, the reader must never be unsure as to whether the viewpoint of the words being read is that of the author or that of the abstractor.

The abstract that follows describes the basis for the document, and its specific recommendations, without getting excessively involved in the validity study made or technical criticism of that study. This is an appropriate mix of substantive and indicative information.

ABST_A national survey of occupational opportunities, wage rates, establishment practices, education plans, and supplementary benefits in bituminous coal mining revealed that production and related workers averaged $15.94 an hour in January 1991, up 82% since the 1983 survey. Over the same period the hourly earnings index rose by 84% for private nonagricultural workers. Reflecting primarily a series of single pay raises, each covering a large group of job classifications, the coal industry continued to have one of the lowest relative dispersion factors of worker earnings among industries studied. Of the 128,390 workers covered by the 1991 survey (virtually all men), underground-mine workers constituted three-fourths of the work force and surface workers constituted one-fourth. About 8 in every 10 workers were employed in mines having collective bargaining agreements with the United Mine Workers. Following the narrative summary are extensive data tables (making up the bulk of the document), subdivided by: (1) underground mines; and (2) surface mines. Tables under each section cover total earnings, work schedules, shift differential practices, educational benefits, paid holidays, vacations, health insurance, retirement plans, occupational earnings by size of mine, and occupational earnings by state or region. Appendixes describe the survey methodology and 40 specific mining occupations. (AA)

FIGURE VI-7: Sample of an Informative/Indicative Abstract

When it is necessary, in an otherwise informative abstract, to note the document's tables, figures, extensive references, or appendixes, the abstractor may often achieve the desired separation of styles by placing this information at the end of the abstract. (For other techniques, see the *ERIC Abstractor/Indexer Workbook*.)

In summary, the informative abstract does what the indicative cannot. It shows the meaningful, coherent relationship between the author's ideas and arguments. As a result, it distinguishes between major and minor information in a document and between this document and others on the same subject. For these reasons, and because it summarizes the content of a document rather than merely giving a generalized account, the informative approach has more utility to the user than other approaches and should be preferred. Informative abstracts should be used for the majority of documents. The indicative approach should be used only in those cases where a document cannot be properly abstracted using solely the informative style.

Although two *"pure"* types of abstracts can be distinguished, the abstractor should, in all practicality, realize that in describing a document's content in an indicative abstract, some information about substance is also being conveyed. Similarly, an informative abstract may, in the normal course, include some information of the "Table of Contents" type.

B. Selection of Abstract Type

The decision to write an informative, indicative, or mixed abstract depends upon the format or structure of the document and the author's organization of the information. The abstractor's reading time will be used to best advantage if this decision is made early. An abstractor should therefore start by examining the document to determine what kind of abstract is required. The following questions might be asked: What is the type of document in hand? What kind of abstract would be most helpful to the user? Is there too much material to be covered in an informative abstract? Will the author's abstract, if any, suffice, or must it be augmented?

1. Informative Abstract

A document with a developed thesis that can be summarized accurately usually requires an informative abstract. Many of the documents in the ERIC database are of this type, e.g.: Research Reports; Speeches/Presentations; and Dissertations.

2. Indicative Abstract

The content of some documents may be varied, broad, or designed for reference purposes. Attempts to summarize such documents may distort their content and thereby mislead the user. An indicative abstract is preferable in such cases. The following types of documents usually require indicative abstracts: Bibliographies; Conference Proceedings; and Reviews of Research.

3. Informative/Indicative Abstract

If a document has many tables, graphs, charts, attachments, appendixes, etc., along with substantive text, it may be appropriate to write a mixed abstract. The following types of documents often have such characteristics: Curriculum Guides or Teacher Guides; Administrative or Program Reports, and Textbooks.

C. Content and Emphases of an Abstract

An abstract should be *weighted* in the same proportions and with the same emphases as the document. (Weighting simply means that an abstract should reflect the author's major and minor points as they were expressed in the document. If an abstract glosses over or deletes an important point and highlights a minor point, the abstract is improperly weighted.)

Proper weighting of the abstract can be accomplished by transmitting accurately, clearly, and completely the essential information in a document. The reader should never be unsure as to the content of a document and must be able to find in the *document* the full corresponding information mentioned in the *abstract*.

Although, by its nature, abstracting is a process of selection, the abstractor must remain objective and must be faithful to the content of the document. Particular personal or professional prejudices should never be introduced, either explicitly or implicitly. Evaluations, unless they are the author's, should never be part of the abstract. An abstractor should consider the following categories of information when writing an abstract, though no one abstract is likely to include information in all categories.

1. **Subject Matter, Scope, and Purposes of Document**

Whenever possible, this should be a summary or condensation of the actual subject matter substance of the work, rather than a mere description or listing of its contents.

2. **Publication/Document Type**

Indicate in the abstract the general form or organization of the work, e.g., whether it is a collection of essays, literature review, humorous piece written with tongue-in-cheek, in-depth analysis, exposé, eyewitness account, commission/committee report, research report, case study, or report of a controlled experiment.

NOTE: This information, essential for a stand-alone abstract, is also coded systematically for searching purposes into the Publication Type cataloging field.

3. **Author's Viewpoint/Bias**

What is the author's viewpoint (e.g., anthropological, sociological, or psychological)? Is one theme or approach emphasized over all others?

4. **Intended Audience**

Is the work oriented toward the theoretician, practitioner, student, parent, teacher, administrator, or researcher? (However, the abstractor should not assume audiences not stated by the document.) Is a specific grade level or education level indicated for curriculum material presented?

5. **Relationship to Other Works (When Stated by Work in Hand)**

Is the work new, claimed as a breakthrough, or does it parallel other work? Do the conclusions reached or methods used contradict other prior work or are they directly inspired by prior work?

NOTE: However, if cross-referencing only to specific related accessions, use the NOTE field.

6. **Intended Use**

Does the work contain materials intended for specific application, e.g., a curriculum supplement, classroom exercises, etc.? (However, the abstractor should not speculate on unstated potential uses of the document.)

7. **Special Features**

Does the work include a large bibliography, glossary, or classification scheme? Do the illustrations include color plates or maps? Is there an index? Are survey instruments or testing devices included? Is the work part of a related series?

NOTE: Some of this information may be covered adequately by the cataloging; some may require elaboration in indicative portions of the abstract.

8. Results or Findings

Were there any formal conclusions, results, findings, or recommendations reached by the work that should be covered? If the conclusions and recommendations are too numerous to include completely, a selection should be made of the most significant or most representative.

D. Audience for the Abstract

The users of the ERIC system are most frequently professionals (teachers, researchers, and administrators) from many different areas of specialization in the field of education. There is, however, a large audience of potential users (new teachers, graduate students, librarians, information center personnel), or people who have only a related interest in the field (parents, journalists), who may not be familiar with the technical jargon of a particular subject matter area. Therefore, *each abstract should be written in a comprehensible style.*

No abstract should be so narrow in outlook, or use language so indigenous to one particular field, that it cannot be read with some understanding by most users of the ERIC system. (Author abstracts will, of course, tend more than abstracts supplied by others to reflect the language and style of the original document.) Documents written in highly technical language (not emulated by the abstract) may require some indication of this fact in the abstract. Yet the abstractor should assume that the readers share a basic core of knowledge (most readers will know much more, of course); therefore, an abstract should not dwell unnecessarily on background information or on commonplace ideas. Lastly, *an abstractor should always remember that the abstract is being written for a user who has not seen the document.*

E. Author Abstracts (When to Use Them)

1. General

When a document does not provide its own abstract, then ERIC must create an abstract for the document. Abstracts created by ERIC should be prepared according to the ERIC guidelines for abstracting.

When a document provides its own abstract (i.e., an "author abstract"), then the Clearinghouse must decide whether to use that abstract as is, whether to modify it, or whether to ignore it and write a new original abstract.

In making this decision, there are several factors to consider, all of which will be discussed below, but it is important to understand above all that *an author abstract need not be written according to ERIC guidelines.* This is not surprising. The vast majority of authors are totally unaware of the ERIC guidelines and could hardly be expected to have observed them when preparing abstracts. It would be unduly restrictive of ERIC to take the position that author abstracts have to be in the ERIC mold in order to be usable.

2. Quality of Author Abstracts

Author abstracts have the advantage of being written by the person who undoubtedly knows best the content of the document and the message that document has for its users. Unfortunately, that is not always a guarantee that an author abstract is written well or even adequately. Author abstracts can, on occasion, be poor and cannot be used. On the other hand, they are frequently quite adequate and can be used. The Clearinghouse must review an author abstract (if one exists) and make a decision as to whether it communicates adequately the subject content of the document in question. In doing this, the Clearinghouse should not impose ERIC standards for abstracting, but rather basic standards for good writing and communication.

On occasion, an author abstract will be adequate except for one or two serious omissions (e.g., failure to summarize the study results) or one or two unfortunate inclusions (e.g., misplaced acknowledgments). In such cases, the author abstract can serve as the basis for an ERIC abstract and the Clearinghouse may decide to use a "modified author abstract." Abstracts should be modified only for good reason. Misspellings and typos should, of course, be corrected, but mere word substitutions, and other changes involving the abstractor's personal preference, should be avoided.

If an author abstract does not adequately communicate the content of a document, then it should not be used.

3. Advantages of Using an Author Abstract

In general, the decision to use or not to use an author abstract should favor using it. An author abstract, if available, should be used unless it is demonstrably of poor quality and fails to communicate. The principal advantages of using an author abstract are as follows:

- an author abstract is more economical. An ERIC abstractor does not have to spend 30 minutes or more analyzing a document and writing a 200-word abstract. The difference in time and cost is significant.

- an author abstract does not leave ERIC open to author (or user) complaints of misrepresentation. This factor can be especially useful if the document is very complex or if the document is on a controversial topic. ERIC cannot be faulted for using an author abstract.

- an author abstract gets the document through the processing cycle faster and results in faster announcement (on average).

4. Inclusion of Abstract Page

If a document includes an abstract, the abstract page should always be regarded as an integral part of the document and should be left intact and included with the document when sent to the Facility for editing and, later, EDRS for filming. This holds whether or not the Clearinghouse chooses to make use of that abstract for its resume.

5. Abstract Attribution

An abstract may be attributed to the author, e.g., "(Author)", to a combination of the author and the ERIC abstractor, e.g., "(Author/JS)", or to the ERIC abstractor alone, e.g. "(JS)". (See also **Section VI-F.3.p**).

The abstract should never be attributed to the author unless there is an actual *abstract* written by the author. *Use of the author's words, selected from different locations throughout the document, does not constitute an author abstract.* Phrases from book jackets or "blurbs," prefaces, introductions, forewords, and conclusions, should not be considered author abstracts.

Author abstracts that have been modified should carry the abstractor/editor's initials after the word "Author." However, abstracts that have been edited so much that the author would no longer recognize his/her own abstract should not be attributed to the author. Similarly, selecting several sentences from an author abstract or paraphrasing an author abstract does not justify citing the abstract as the author's. Author abstracts that also carry the abstractor's initials may have been augmented to identify the population sampled, the population size, geographical area where the study was conducted; may spell out an acronym or abbreviation; or may have information as to appendixes, references, statistical data, etc., added at the end of the abstract. The idea is that the changes or additions should be minor and such that the integrity of the author's abstract is essentially left intact and the author's abstract as originally written is still clearly visible. If an abstractor changes the author's language, re-arranges sentences, etc., the abstract is no longer the author's, and no author attribution should be made.

F. Rules and Authorities for Writing Abstracts

1. Authorities and Style Manuals

Most of the data fields in ERIC require fairly rigid conformance to standards established by the *ERIC Processing Manual* (EPM). However, in the Abstract field a more pragmatic approach is followed.

The principal authorities used are the University of Chicago *Manual of Style* and the *GPO Style Manual*, two of the most common and easily available manuals. Practices that can be supported by *either* authority are acceptable. Where meaning would be adversely affected, as with incomplete sentences, disagreement of verb and subject, dangling participles, incorrect capitalization, lost antecedents, incorrect spelling, etc., the guidance provided by these manuals is followed closely. Where frequently repeated structures are involved, such as lists, in which lack of uniformity is very visible, a standard ERIC format is observed. However, in many other situations the Abstract field does not operate under a rigid set of rules, but rather follows a flexible set of guidelines that permit considerable latitude in style as long as the resultant abstract is basically correct, succinct, and the meaning is clear.

Such an arrangement fits the ERIC processing environment where the abstractors are not all in one location; where they do not all receive a common training; where they may be on-site or off-site, faculty, students, freelancers, or subcontractors; where author abstracts may be used; and where the centralized editorial time available is not sufficient for the substantial re-writing of abstracts.

2. General Rules

Brevity, succinctness, and clarity are essential characteristics of a well-written abstract. Brevity is achieved by writing the most compact and concise abstract possible. Do not ramble. Too many words may indicate that an abstract includes details not directly significant, instead of concentrating on the principal ideas and facts. Avoid the unnecessary, the obvious, and the empty (e.g., "Chapter 1 is an introduction..."). Information already apparent from the title should not ordinarily be repeated directly or paraphrased, though exceptions to this rule will arise.

Clarity in style is achieved by following the accepted rules for good writing. Useful sources of information about style and writing standards are listed in **Figure VI-8.** Clearinghouses should equip themselves with at least the latest editions of the Chicago *Manual of Style* (for rules about grammar, syntax, and good writing practice) and the *GPO Style Manual* (for many specifics in the areas of punctuation, spelling, capitalization, numerals, etc.). For specific advice on abstracts, ANSI standard Z39.14 on "Writing Abstracts" is recommended.

3. Specific Rules

a. Length

Abstracts ordinarily are limited to approximately 200 words. Within this limitation, there is no preferred length for an abstract, because the appropriate length is determined by the content of the document.

Exceptions to the length limitation occur in the case of "Table of Contents" indicative type abstracts (as for example one listing the papers in a conference proceedings), and abstracts for machine-readable data files. For example, in order to list all the papers in a proceedings, it may be necessary to use more than 200 words. (One possible way of shortening an abstract covering papers in a proceedings volume is to compress author names by substituting initials for first and middle names, but this should be done only as a last resort.)

Abstracts over 200 words should have a specific justification as in the cases noted above. Abstracts significantly over 300 words should be avoided. Abstracts over 400 words are not permitted.

b. Format

(1) Paragraphs

An abstract is always one paragraph long. The accepted rules about paragraph writing must be followed, especially those concerning coherence and unity. A coherent paragraph contains connected sentences, each following the other in logical order. An abstractor can avoid writing a paragraph that is nothing more than a series of sentences, each one summarizing a separate topic in the document, by deft use of transitional words and phrases.

The American Heritage Dictionary. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1982. "Style Manual" Section (p.55-63).

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Campbell, W.G. *Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers*. New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1990. Eighth Edition.

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Follett, Wilson. *Modern American Usage*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1979.

Hodges, John C. and Others, Editors. *Harbrace College Handbook*. New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990. Eleventh Edition.

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Johnson, Edward D. *The Handbook of Good English*. New York, Facts on File Publications, 1982.

Jordan, L., Ed. *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage*. New York, Times Co., 1976. Revised Edition.

Nicholson, Margaret. *Practical Style Guide for Authors and Editors*. New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1980.

Perrin, Porter G. *Reference Handbook of Grammar and Usage*. New York, William Merrill, 1972.

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U.S. Government Printing Office. *GPO Style Manual*. Washington, DC, 1988.

University of Chicago Press. *A Manual of Style*. 1984. Thirteenth Edition.

Webster's Secretarial Handbook. Springfield, Massachusetts, G. & C. Merriam Co., 1984. Second Edition.

Webster's Standard American Style Manual. Springfield, Massachusetts, Merriam-Webster, 1985.

Weil, Ben H. "Standards for Writing Abstracts." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, v.21, n.5, p.351-357, September-October 1970.

Weil, Ben H. "Technical Abstracting Fundamentals: II, Writing Principles and Practices." *Journal of Chemical Documentation*, v.3, n.3, p.125-132, 1963.

FIGURE VI-8: GUIDES, AUTHORITIES, AND STANDARDS COVERING ABSTRACTS AND WRITING STYLE

A paragraph should have a *topic sentence*, some central statement of the document's major thesis, from which the rest of the sentences can develop. (This is especially important in an *informative* abstract.) Generally, the topic sentence is the first sentence of the abstract, and because it occupies this strategic position, it should be as full and accurate a statement as possible of what the document is about, its purpose, and its audience. In the case of research papers, the topic sentence should describe the hypothesis, what was studied or researched and why, the methodology employed, and the study population.

(2) Sentences

Sentence length should vary as much as possible to avoid the unpleasant effect of a series of short, choppy sentences. Be terse, not telegraphic. Use complete sentences, omitting neither verbs nor conjunctions. Avoid the overlong, complex sentence in which the abstractor piles up clauses and phrases, especially qualifiers and modifiers, in an attempt to include as much as possible in one sentence. Appropriate use of numbered sequences and parenthetical qualifiers can often make a complex sentence more readable. Avoid the list that forces one verb awkwardly to do the work of several. Every sentence should have high information density and, without being cryptic, convey a maximum amount of information in a minimum number of words.

c. Language and Vocabulary

To best convey the flavor of the original document and to facilitate retrieval based on natural text, incorporate key words from the document into the abstract (especially if they are repeated often). Avoid direct quotations, however, for they usually do not carry enough information to be excerpted. However, single words or short phrases should be quoted if the author has coined a new phrase that is seminal to the study and if failure to call attention to it would be misleading. *The abstract should generally follow the wording and sequence of the document, especially when stating results or conclusions.* The language of the document should *not* be converted in the abstract to the terminology of the ERIC *Thesaurus* or IAL. New or technical terms should be defined briefly. Also polemical, controversial, or exceptionally suggestive words may be placed within quotation marks.

The abstractor should *try* to avoid beginning the abstract with phrases such as:

—"This report..." and
—"The purpose of this report (or document) is...."

However, sometimes clarity and the direct statement approach virtually force the abstractor to such constructions.

Also, the abstractor should avoid the monotonous repetition of sentences starting with:

—"It was suggested that...,"
—"It was found that...," and
—"It was reported that...."

or ending with such ineffective phrases as:

—"...are discussed" and
—"...are given."

However, passive voice constructions may be justified and even unavoidable when writing indicative abstracts. (See below under "Voice.")

d. Voice

The *active* voice emphasizes the *doer* of the action, e.g., *"The professor read the document."*

The *passive* voice emphasizes the *receiver* of the action, e.g., *"The document was read by the student."*

Use the *active* voice whenever possible in an *informative* abstract because it allows for direct expression when summarizing the content of the document and usually requires less space than the passive voice.

Use the *passive* voice in an *indicative* abstract to describe and to highlight the process of creating the document. Passive constructions, such as the following, should appear primarily in an indicative abstract: "...are included...," "...are discussed...," "...is presented...," "...are reviewed...."

e. Person

Abstracts should be written in the third person and should not contain unclear references to "I," "we," or "you." For example, a sentence such as "We have a Department of Education..." should be changed so that the meaning of "we" is explicit, not implicit, e.g., "The United States has a Department of Education...." Use of the third person plural can often conveniently avoid use of the gender-explicit pronouns "he" or "she."

f. Tense

The tense of the document can suggest the tense of the abstract. The present tense is proper for an indicative abstract, e.g., "...*are* listed...," instead of "...*were* listed...." Strive for tense consistency throughout the abstract.

g. Antecedents

Indefinite references to "it" should be avoided unless the antecedent is quite clear. Failure to make the antecedent of a relative pronoun clear is one of the most common writing errors.

h. Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviations should be avoided and acronyms kept to a minimum. If a long phrase with a recognized acronym is used more than once, it may be spelled out the first time it appears in the abstract and the acronym used thereafter. At the time of initial use, the acronym should be placed in parentheses (*without periods*) following the term (e.g., Mobilization for Youth (MFY)). This is not necessary, however, if both spelled out version and acronym appear in the title, in which case the acronym may be used by itself throughout the abstract. If it is necessary, because of space limitations, to abbreviate, it is permissible to use the common "shorthand" of the field, e.g.: "SES" for Socioeconomic Status or "IQ" for Intelligence Quotient.

i. Lists

A "list" within an abstract is a series of items complex enough to benefit from or to require enumeration. When it is necessary to list such a series of items in the abstract, use an initial colon followed by numbered phrases separated by semicolons. The numbers indicating each item should be in parentheses (to distinguish them from any numbers that might appear in the text itself).

For example:

Conclusions are a common "list":

> Three conclusions were drawn from the survey:
> (1) AAAAA; (2) BBBBB; (3) CCCCC.

The "Table of Contents" abstract is a type of list: *

> Fourteen papers were presented at the conference: (1) "Alpha" (Betty Jones); (2) "Beta" (Tom Smith); (3) "Gamma" (David Johnson)...

Note that simple sequences may not require the "list" approach, e.g., "Respondents expressed concern about classroom management, ability grouping, and student assessment."

* Full-text searching techniques permit a "Table of Contents" type abstract to provide access to the titles and authors of individual presentations even when they are not separately processed.

j. Numbers, Measurement, Time, etc.

In general, follow the rules in the *GPO Style Manual*, Section 12 on "Numerals." These rules are too extensive to summarize here, but some major points are:

- In general, numerals referring to sections, chapters, etc., should be recorded in Arabic, in accordance with GPO and "Chicago" rules. When the numbers pertaining to sections, chapters, etc., have been written out in the document, they should be converted to Arabic numbers.

- A figure is used for a single number of 10 or more, with the exception of the first word of the sentence: e.g.:

1-9	=	"The survey was sent to five schools";
10 or more	=	"The survey was sent to 150 schools";
first word	=	"Twenty schools received the survey."
mixture	=	"There were 8 teachers, 14 students, and 25 administrators present."

- Units of measurement and time are expressed in figures, e.g., "50 tons"; and the comma is used in a number containing four or more digits, e.g: "1,756".

k. Ethnic Group Names (Capitalization)

In the case of documents concerned with the two broad racial groups, blacks (Negroes) and whites (Caucasians), abstractors should follow the practice of lower-casing these terms, i.e., "blacks and whites."

However, in the case of documents concerned with Blacks and/or Whites *and* other ethnic, national, or racial groups, such as Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, etc., abstractors should follow the practice of using initial capital letters for all group names appearing in the abstract, e.g., "Blacks, Asian Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans." Names of ethnic groups used in the abstract should follow usage in the document, e.g. use "Afro American" if the document uses it; do not arbitrarily change it to "African Americans."

l. Quotations and Quotation Marks

Direct quotations from the document are not considered a good way to build an entire abstract. It is usually not possible to get a good narrative flow with this approach and the text available to quote is rarely as succinct as an abstract needs to be. Nevertheless, single words or short phrases may sometimes usefully be quoted to identify newly coined text or to point up polemical, controversial, or unusually suggestive words used in the document.

The titles of books and journals, that would normally be underlined, should instead be enclosed in quotation marks. (The underline is not a valid character in ERIC text.)

Table-of-Contents type abstracts that list, for example, the papers of a conference or the chapters of a book, should enclose the titles of the paper or chapters in quotation marks.

Material within an abstract that is between quotation marks is assumed to be directly from the document in hand, so no detailed attribution statement is necessary.

m. Noting the Existence of Large Bibliographies or Reference Lists within Documents

If a document contains or has appended a large bibliography or list of references, this is a useful fact that should be passed along to the user, generally by a statement toward the end of the abstract, e.g.:

- "Contains 150 references."
- "Appendix C is an annotated bibliography containing 250 references grouped by books, articles, and non-print materials."
- "Each paper in this proceedings volume cites an extensive list of references; it contains 309 references overall."
- "A suggested reading list is provided containing 50 references to the 'best' and most up-to-date material on nuclear disarmament."

Not all references are worth noting. Most documents contain some references. It would ***not*** be helpful to note ad infinitum *"Contains 2 references," "Contains 3 references,"* etc. This would enlarge ERIC resumes needlessly with a proliferation of non-useful information. The number of references worth calling attention to is a judgment call on the part of the cataloger and depends to some extent on the specifics or breadth of the topic under consideration. The only guidance is that the quantity must be "significant." Certainly anything over 100 would probably fall in this category and anything under 10 probably would not. The range from 11 to 99 is therefore a "gray" area, open to the judgment of the cataloger/abstractor.

The exact number of references should be cited whenever possible. If the number is not stated by the document and the references are not numbered, there may be occasional cases where counting would be excessively onerous and some general order of magnitude may be given, e.g., *"Contains approximately 300 references."* However, in general, when including information about references at all, it is best to use an exact number. References should *not* be quantified in terms of number of pages.

If a *major* part of a document consists of a bibliography, Clearinghouses should, of course, assign the Publication Type for "Bibliography" (131). However, this should be done *only*, when the document is essentially a bibliography or reference list, with perhaps some explanatory text added.

Note that in all the above examples, the phrase "contain(s)(ing)...X references" occurs. Textual searches of the following type will retrieve accessions bearing this phrase, most of which will be documents with significant numbers of references.

S contain? (2W) references[2]

n. **Appendixes**

Many ERIC documents have appendixes containing significant information. It is often appropriate to cite a document's major appendixes at the end of the Abstract. When doing so, it is best to be explicit about number, content, and length (relative to the text of the document).

Unacceptable "The report contains five appendixes."

Acceptable "Three appendixes list the workshop participants, their test results, and their evaluations of the instructors."

"The following appendixes comprise the last 3 of the document's 13 sections: (1) ERIC Clearinghouse Scope of Interest Guide; (2) Document Preparation (for Filming); and (3) Glossary of Terms.

[2] S = Search; ? = "Wild Card" Characters; 2W = within two words. (The illustration is a proximity search in DIALOG's command structure.

o. **English Language**

ERIC accepts non-English documents for the database. Clearinghouses selecting non-English documents are responsible for producing an English language abstract that accurately reflects the non-English text. (The *ERIC Network Directory* contains a "Language Bank" of individuals in the network who may be able to assist with translations.) Except for proper names, spelling should follow standard American English usage (e.g., *"centers"* not *"centres," "labor"* not *"labour"*). Table of Contents type abstracts, listing non-English conference paper titles, ideally should provide a brief English translation in parentheses following each non-English title cited, size and other limiting factors permitting.

p. **Abstractor Identification**

Each abstract should carry a designation as to its preparer. This identification should be in parentheses at the end of the abstract. The initials of the abstractor should be written without periods, e.g.:

ABSTRACTOR	EXAMPLE
The abstract was written entirely by the abstractor. Use abstractor initials.	(AS)
The abstract was written entirely by the author and was used unchanged.	(Author)
The abstractor revised an author abstract. Both should be credited.	(Author/GDC)
Abstract as obtained from an external service, e.g., the National Technical Information Service.	(NTIS) or (NTIS/AS)

FIGURE VI-9: Abstractor Identification Examples

4. Abstracting Specific Kinds of Documents

Different types of documents require different types of abstracts. Even when dealing with the same general type of abstract, however, it may be necessary to vary the approach in order to accommodate different kinds of documents. The following guidelines provide specific advice for some of the more common types of documents.

a. Reports (Research and Technical)

These usually require *informative* abstracts, which should contain:

- objectives and hypotheses of the research;
- methodology, summarized succinctly, including perhaps subjects (always provide N = if available), geographic location, ethnic/racial factors, variables, controls, conditions, and tests;
- findings and conclusions (emphasized); and
- *specific* implications and/or recommendations for further research.

If limitations to the study are mentioned, they should be included. Background information should be used only if necessary to explain the objectives. A description of unusual or extensive appendixes may be included at the end of the abstract.

b. Speeches/Presentations

These reports usually require *informative* abstracts which should contain:

- background information only if necessary;
- statement of premise or thesis;
- development of ideas or arguments with proofs and major supporting facts; and
- conclusions.

c. Curriculum Guides/Teacher Guides

These usually require *indicative* abstracts, which should contain:

- subject area and grade level of the curricular material;
- specific objectives of the course;
- particularly interesting methods used; and
- supplementary activities and materials suggested.

d. Program Descriptions/Administrative Reports

Because of the large amount of narrative detail, these usually require *indicative* abstracts, which should contain:

- objectives of the program and identification of the target population;
- types of special teachers and other personnel and total numbers of classes or students involved;
- means or suggested means used to carry out the program;
- special methods used to overcome problems; and
- up-to-date progress of the program with any anticipated changes in plans, or, if the program has been completed, a statement of the program's effectiveness.

e. Textbooks/Instructional Materials

These usually require *indicative* abstracts, which should contain:

- objectives of the text, including target student population;
- description of the general nature of the subject matter; and
- special methods used in meeting objectives, including notation of illustrations and accompanying activities.

Recounting specific textual material is not necessary, unless doing so will explain methods used in achieving objectives.

f. Bibliographies/Directories

These usually require *indicative* abstracts, which should contain:

- subjects included;
- reference to annotations, if any;
- dates of materials (earliest to latest);
- types of materials listed;
- number of entries (approximate, if necessary);
- data fields included in entries;
- potential users or target audience.

g. Multiple-Author Works (e.g., Conference Proceedings)

Depending on the number of papers included and space limitations, these usually require *indicative* abstracts, which should contain: brief statement of the subject and scope of the collection and narrative-type table of contents, indicating titles and authors. If there are too many articles to list, distinguish broad subject areas and group the articles.

(If a document contains a large number of important papers, Clearinghouse personnel may decide to assign separate accession numbers to substantive items and to write separate informative abstracts for these "analyzed" items. Each resume for papers or sections separately analyzed should, of course, include a cross-reference to the parent item.) (See **"Analytics" in Section V.**)

h. Tests/Measurement Materials

These usually require indicative abstracts, which should contain: purpose and objective of the test; forms and levels of the test, including length and whether verbal or non-verbal; identification of the group to be tested, including grades, ages, etc.; description of the testing, scoring, and grading methods to be observed, including time limits, whether individually or group administered, qualifications needed to administer, special equipment needed, etc.; and normative data and any information concerning reliability, validity, and test development.

Tests or measurement/evaluation instruments, accompanying a report as supporting documentation, should always be indicated by assignment of PUBTYPE 160, and may even be analyzed out as a separate accession (see Section on "Analytics.") The ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation may be consulted if there are questions relating to such material.

i. Congressional Hearings

Hearings should generally be abstracted using a mixed informative/indicative approach. The indicative approach will cover the persons and organizations presenting testimony. The informative approach will cover any results, conclusions, recommendations, or clear trend to the testimony or proposed Government legislative action.

j. Machine-Readable Data Files (MRDF)

In the case of Machine-Readable Data Files (Pubtype 102), the ERIC guidelines for writing indicative abstracts should be observed, with the exception that a data file abstract may be longer than a document abstract (i.e., with an upper limit of 300 words in lieu of the regular limit of 200 words).

Data files collect data on specific variables/questions/factors. These variables constitute the best and most useful characterization of the content of the file. Variables should be regarded as a kind of subject index term, closely related to ERIC's familiar Descriptors and Identifiers. All major variables (but not all their variations) should be described in the abstract. Variable names should generally follow the language used by the data file itself (or its documentation). If the names are not sufficiently descriptive, however, they should be improved, as appropriate.

Since the ERIC resume format is designed for bibliographic entities and not for data files, RIE does not provide for all of the specialized fields needed to do justice to data file descriptions. One solution is to "segment" the abstract by certain of the more important fields. For example, at the end of the RIE abstract some of the crucial data can be stacked, each stack preceded by a standard Header, e.g.,

FREQUENCY: Biennial. TYPE OF SURVEY: Longitudinal
POPULATION: Higher Education Institutions (3,183). RESPONSE RATE: Higher Education Institutions (2,770=87%)
YEAR OF LATEST DATA: 1980.

The concept here is that through the capability of full text proximity searching, using the combination of the standard Header and the actual data, a computer searcher can simulate having a special field on which to search. The official "segments" are as follows:

- **TYPE OF SURVEY**

The purpose of this segment is to index the file by survey type. The types identified to date are shown in the small authority list below. Since a given file may simultaneously belong to several categories of survey, multiple entries in this field are permissible.

Census [i.e., total universe]
Population Survey
Sample Survey
Longitudinal Survey
Cross Sectional Survey
Follow-up Survey

- **POPULATION (Size)**

A file may represent data gathered from the total universe of cases (i.e., the "population") or from a sample of that universe. In either case, the total universe should be described in this field. The description should, if possible, be in the form of the name of the data source followed by, if available, their number (actual or estimated, per documentation) in parentheses, e.g. "Private Schools (27,000)"; "College Presidents (17,000)."

- **SAMPLE (Size)**

If the file represents data based on an sample of a larger universe of cases, then the sample should be described in this field. The description should be in the form of the name of the data sources followed by, if available, their number in parentheses, e.g., "Private Schools (1,000)."

- **RESPONDENTS (Source of Data)**

  This field should answer the question as to who or what has completed the survey instrument or responded to the data-gathering methodology. Types of respondents should be indicated by using their most common generic name form, e.g., School Administrators, Students, Parents, Faculty, Counselors, Graduates, Doctors, Chief Executive Officers, Mothers, College Presidents, etc.

- **RESPONSE RATE**

  If the file represents data based on responses received from a sample taken from a larger universe, then the responses received (and the response rate) should be described here. The description should be in the form of the name of the respondents (data sources) followed by their number and the percent that number is of the total sample, e.g., "Private Schools (809=81%).

- **FREQUENCY (Periodicity of Data Collection)**

  This field should answer the question as to how frequently these data are gathered. In order to provide searchers with a standard set of "frequency" terms on which to search, a small authority list has been developed (e.g., weekly, monthly, etc.). The complete authority list appears below. Data that have been gathered only once, and that will not necessarily ever be gathered again, should be indicated by the word "Once" in this field. Data that have (or will be) gathered multiple times, but with no particular schedule, should be indicated by the preferred usage "Periodic" (in lieu of "Irregular" or "Occasional").

  Available Frequencies:

Once	Weekly	Annual
Periodic	Monthly	Biennial
	Quarterly	Triennial
	Semiannual	Decennial

- **YEAR OF EARLIEST DATA (of Subfiles in the Series)**

  If the file being described is part of a series, then record here the year applicable to the earliest data in that series. Any entry in this field should be a single calendar year.

- **YEAR OF LATEST DATA**

  If the data apply to a particular year (or span of years), then enter the year(s) here, individually, for searching purposes.

  If the data do not apply to a particular year (or span of years), but were gathered in a particular year (or span of years), then enter the year(s) here, individually, for searching purposes.

A sample resume for an MRDF is shown as **Figure VI-10**.

ED 285 515 HE 020 846
American College Freshman; 1984 Survey; Final Merged File [machine-readable data file].
California Univ., Los Angeles. Higher Education Research Inst.
Spons Agency—American Council on Education, Washington, D.C.
Report No.—EF000101
Pub Date—84
Note—For publication covering 1984 version of this data file, see ED 255 106.
Available from—University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Graduate School of Education, Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), Los Angeles, CA 90024. Telephone: (213) 825-1925.
Pub Type— Machine-Readable Data Files (102)
Document Not Available from EDRS.
Descriptors—*Biographical Inventories, Career Choice, College Applicants, College Bound Students, *College Freshmen, Financial Aid Applicants, Higher Education, *National Norms, *National Surveys, Norms, Political Attitudes, Social Values, Student Educational Objectives
Identifiers—*Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Student Information Form

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) is a continuing longitudinal study of the American higher educational system. CIRP annually conducts a survey of students entering college as first-time, full-time freshmen. The freshman surveys began in 1966; the 1984 survey is the nineteenth in the series. All institutions responding to the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS) (and having more than 25 incoming students) are invited to participate. The survey is conducted via a Student Information Form (SIF) designed for proctored self-administration during the first two weeks of school. The SIF data are read by an optical mark reader. Approximately 20% of the invited institutions participate; this captures data on approximately 20% of the total number of freshmen. The 1984 file contains data from 526 institutions on 271,647 students. The data contain a wide range of biographic and demographic information. Some of the more substantive SIF variables are: high school background and activities; career plans and goals; educational aspirations; current attitudes; reasons for attending college; parents' education and occupation; parents' and student's religious preference; parents' income; political attitudes; social values; sources of financial support. In addition to data returned directly by the participating institutions, a wide variety of institutional data are obtained from the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) and are used in conjunction with the data obtained annually. Data obtained from the College Board include: total freshmen by sex; SAT and ACT composite score quartiles; full-time/part-time status; percentages of students from in state that commute and that are in campus housing; tuition costs, fees, room and board costs, cost of books and supplies, transportation costs; total scholarship/grant dollars expended; student loan dollars provided; jobs offered and obtained for students. Each year, four machine-readable data files (MRDF) are developed from the SIF: (1) an institutional summary file containing institutional identification numbers and an institutional summary of the responses for men and women; (2) a file containing individual responses and a student identification number, but no names and addresses; (3) a name-and-address file containing a second, independent student identification number; and (4) a "link" file containing only the two independent identification numbers. This last file is maintained under an elaborate system developed to ensure strict confidentiality of individual student data and to protect against misuse of the name-and-address file. TYPE OF SURVEY: National Survey; Cross Sectional Survey. POPULATION: Higher Education Institutions (2734) College Freshmen (2,000,000). SAMPLE: Higher Education Institutions (2641=97%); College Freshmen (1,635,208=82%). RESPONDENTS: Higher Education Institutions (526=20%); College Freshmen (271,647=17%). FREQUENCY OF UPDATE: Annual. YEAR OF FIRST DATA: 1966. (WTB)

FIGURE VI-10: MACHINE-READABLE DATA FILE—(SAMPLE ENTRY)

5. Local Conventions for Specialized Problems

Each of the ERIC Clearinghouses confronts writing and related style problems that are specific, if not unique, to their respective scope areas. Ideally, a "local" standard or consistent way of dealing with these problems should be developed.

For example, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics has developed the following "local" practice for dealing in the abstract with the well-known phrase "English as a Second Language."

- The phrase will always be written in initial capitals, e.g., " ...students learning English as a Second Language."
- When used as an adjective, the phrase will be hyphenated, e.g., "...teachers in the English-as-a-Second-Language classroom."
- The abbreviation ESL will be placed after the first appearance of the phrase, after which the abbreviation alone can be used to represent the concept, e.g., "...students learning English as a Second Language (ESL)...The ESL student performed best on..."

G. Rules for Writing Annotations

1. Definition and Function of an Annotation

An annotation is a succinct explanation or description of a particular work. Although closely related to an abstract, an annotation is considerably briefer and therefore usually characterizes rather than summarizes.

In the ERIC system, annotations of no more than 50 words are prepared for journal articles (EJ Accession Series) announced in *Current Index to Journals in Education* (CIJE). The purpose of an annotation is to explain and indicate important facets of content not evident from the Title, Descriptors, or Identifiers, and thereby to facilitate the user's search of the periodical literature.

2. General Approach to Annotating

Annotations are recommended for CIJE citations. If the scope of an article is adequately expressed by the title, bibliographic citation, and accompanying Descriptors or Identifiers, an annotation is not mandatory. If, however, the normal entry fails to convey subject content or an important feature or aspect of the substance of an article, an annotation should be added. *If in doubt, always supply an annotation.* The true meaning and utility of an article may be lost because of a clever title (e.g., "Climb the Ladder" or "Send No Box Tops") or a highly technical title (e.g., "The Saint-Cloud Method: What It Can and Cannot Achieve" or "Tandhoff's Disease in a Scottish Family"). When this situation occurs, an annotation must be added.

Either informative or indicative annotations are permissible. However, the brevity of the annotation form presupposes that most annotations will be of the indicative type. An indicative annotation is written from the point of view of an informed and objective third person and describes the content, format, or use of an article. In contrast, an informative annotation presents an objective summary of the author's own ideas, or one or more of the conclusions presented. Because of its size limitations, an annotation of this type will generally not present in condensed form a summary of the article itself. In other words, though the same general approach of developing a concise representation of a document holds true for annotating as well as for abstracting, an annotation, unlike an abstract, does not have to be weighted in the same proportions and with the same emphasis as the original article. Lengthy informative annotations should not be used.

As with an indicative abstract, an annotation should avoid evaluative language (particularly negative evaluations) introducing personal or professional prejudices. However, useful "guiding" statements can be used, such as the following: "Written for the non-specialist"; "Designed to be helpful to the practicing English teacher"; and "Attempts a clear explanation of a complex topic."

3. Specific Rules for Writing Annotations

Unless otherwise stated below, the rules that pertain to abstracts also apply to annotations.

a. Length

Annotations should as a rule not exceed 50 words. Most annotations will generally be between 30 and 50 words in length. There is a fixed upper limit of 60 words observed by the CIJE Publisher; however, there is no fixed lower limit. Author- or editor-provided annotations to articles may be used or re-written to conform to the 50-word limitation, if necessary.

b. Format

Annotations should be only one paragraph long. Whole sentences are preferable, but telegraphic sentences (not used in RIE abstracts) are acceptable, e.g., *"Categorizes all types of at risk students."* Simple phrases or lists may also be used, e.g., *"A code of ethics for counselors."* Since annotations are not necessarily written in full sentences, some of the mechanics of style described in the various style manuals do not pertain.

c. Language and Vocabulary

Since an annotation is basically an attempt to improve on an uninformative title, the annotation should avoid repeating specific terms contained in the Title or Descriptors. In other words, use the annotation to bring in fresh information, rather than to repeat information already available in the entry. This is not a strict prohibition, as circumstances will sometimes necessitate that a term be repeated. If special or unusual words appear in the title, the annotation can be used to explain them. Unlike an abstract, an annotation may be composed of a quotation excerpted from the article (and punctuated as such).

d. Example of Annotation

Title: *Homeplace: Experiencing a National Historic Landmark*

```
ABST_Gifted high school students collaborated on a
study of the architecture and lifestyle associated
with Homeplace, an 18th century French Colonial
home in Louisiana.  The activities culminated in a
multimedia exhibit at a local art gallery. (AA)
```

FIGURE VI-11: Annotation Augmenting Non-Informative Title

H. Relationship Between Abstract and Other Data Fields

An ERIC resume attempts to be a thorough but succinct characterization of a document/article. Duplication and redundancy should generally be avoided in the textual fields: Title, Institution Name, Sponsoring Agency Name, Note, and Abstract. For example, it would be a waste of space and words to repeat needlessly the Title or Institution Name in the Abstract.

This admonition does not, however, apply to the "index" fields (Descriptors, Identifiers, Geographic Source, Language, Publication Type, etc.), where the job of the field is often to index and standardize information appearing elsewhere in the resume.

- **Title Field**

  The Title field should generally not be repeated in the Abstract. Although it is virtually impossible to avoid using some words from the Title, exact repetition should be avoided, particularly for such documents as conference proceedings, hearings, etc., where the location and dates are usually a regular part of the Title.

- **Institution/Sponsoring Agency Name**

  The name of the preparing institution and the sponsoring agency will appear in the INST_ and SPON_ fields, respectively, and should not be repeated in the Abstract.

- **Descriptive Note**

  The NOTE_ field may contain a wide variety of information, e.g., dissertation/thesis information, reproducibility information, conference information (when not part of the Title). None of this information should be repeated in the Abstract.

- **"Index" Fields (e.g., Descriptor, Identifier, Publication Type, Geographic Source)**

  Information appearing in the various "index" fields may appear in the Abstract, as needed, without restriction or fear of redundancy. The purpose of these fields is to standardize access points. Inevitably these fields will draw on the Abstract for their content.

I. Guidelines for the Editing (by the ERIC Facility) of Clearinghouse-Prepared Abstracts

As part of the review of RIE resumes, the ERIC Facility editors review all abstracts received from the Clearinghouses. Their primary responsibility is to ensure that there are no discrepancies between the content of the abstract and the document (e.g., abstract lists something that is not in the document; all names of persons, organizations, tests, etc., are accurately recorded). In addition, the editors watch for the following kinds of situations, making needed changes as indicated to ensure reasonable consistency among abstracts.

1. Overall Size

"...abstracts are limited to approximately 200 words." (EPM VI.F.3.a).

Informative abstracts that significantly exceed 200 words should be brought to the attention of the submitting Clearinghouse, but should generally *not* be re-written unless the size exceeds 300 words. The objective is to catch the problem at the point abstracts are written and to keep the occurrences to isolated instances that do not require re-write. If the problem persists, it should be pursued via managerial channels. Recurrences may, at the judgment of the editor, be negotiated with the Clearinghouse for either: return to the Clearinghouse for re-write, or reduction in size by the Facility.

Abstracts significantly *under* the 200 words size limitation are not to be considered a problem.

2. Type of Abstract (Informative vs Indicative vs Informative/Indicative)

The choice of type of abstract is the Clearinghouse's. The Facility should, in general, not question this choice.

3. Missing Information

There may be cases in which significant information, e.g., conclusions or recommendations, has been left out of the abstract. The most usual situation occurs when there are significant indicative aspects of the document that might be communicated, but the Clearinghouse has ignored these aspects, e.g., appendixes, attachments, large bibliography, multi-volumes, etc. The Facility editors may, at their discretion, add such information to the abstract, alerting the Clearinghouse when this is judged advisable.

4. Acronyms

Facility editors should ensure that all acronyms appearing in the abstract are interpreted somewhere in the abstract (preferably at their first occurrence).

5. Abbreviations (as Distinguished from Acronyms)

Facility editors should replace abbreviations with the full form of the word, except in special situations such as when the abbreviation is in quotes or the abbreviation is the standard form of the concept in the literature of the field, e.g., "SES."

6. Slang, Swear Words, etc.

Facility editors should generally replace slang and swear words with meaningful and non-offensive equivalents, except in special situations such as when the colloquial word is being treated per se and is essential to the statement being made.

7. **Derogatory, Pejorative, or Libelous Statements Concerning Individuals or Organizations**

Facility editors should question all seemingly derogatory, pejorative, or libelous statements found in abstracts. Such statements should either be deleted or the editor should receive management approval for their inclusion.

8. **Evaluative Statements and Product Comparisons**

Facility editors should question all statements making evaluations or direct comparisons of organizations or commercial products. Such statements should either be deleted or the editor should receive management approval for their inclusion.

9. **Typographical Errors/Misspelled Words**

All typographical errors and misspelled words detected by the editors should be corrected.

10. **Incomplete Sentences**

Telegraphic sentences are not acceptable in RIE abstracts and should be expanded by the Facility editors to complete sentences.

11. **Missing Words or Lines**

Occasionally words or phrases are inadvertently deleted in the keying or transmission process, resulting in ungrammatical or incongruous sentences. The editors should research the missing information and replace the missing material.

12. **Abstract Attribution**

The abstract should be attributed accurately. If the abstract appears in the document, but is attributed to the Clearinghouse abstractor, a correction to "author" abstract status should be made. If the abstract is attributed to the author, but does *not* appear in the document, a correction to the Clearinghouse abstractor's initials should be made.

13. **Repetitive/Redundant Information**

If information that appears in the Title field, Note field, or other field is repeated *unnecessarily* in the abstract, the Facility editors may, at their discretion, remove such redundant information from one or the other of the two fields, making the necessary transitions.

14. **Author/Abstractor Confusion (Who's Talking?)**

If there is significant confusion in the abstract between what is said by the author of the document and what is said by the abstractor, the Facility editor may eliminate the confusion, contacting the Clearinghouse as needed to accomplish this.

15. **Paragraph Structure**

All abstracts must be self-contained in one paragraph. Abstracts structured as more than one paragraph must be converted to the one paragraph format.

16. Lists

Lists are to follow the format specified in the EPM: "The following conclusions were drawn: (1) xxxxx; (2) xxxxx; and (3) xxxxx." Lists in the abstract not in this format should be converted to it.

17. Numbers, Measurement, Time

In general, the *GPO Style Manual* calls for Arabic numbers in preference to Roman numerals,[3] numbers rather than words for values of ten or over, units of measurement or time expressed in numbers rather than words, commas in numbers of four digits or more. Where the GPO rules have not been adhered to, the Facility may make the changes necessary to achieve consistency within a Clearinghouse-produced or modified abstract (*but not within an unmodified author abstract.*) Because such changes can be numerous, however, it is critical that the Facility contact the Clearinghouse to ensure that the problem is fixed at the source. Because rules pertaining to numbers have cosmetic value, but little or no impact on computerized retrieval, it is more important to be consistent within an abstract than it is to be consistent across the whole of RIE. (The use of author abstracts alone would prevent such consistency across the database.)

The Chicago *Manual of Style* says, "It is difficult if not impossible to be entirely consistent in the use of numbers in textual matter" (p.232). The *GPO Style Manual* and the Chicago *Manual of Style*, while they do not entirely agree on all points pertaining to numbers, are both useful because they each cover some ground not covered by the other.

18. Commonly Confused Words

Occasionally words that are commonly confused may appear in their "confused" form in ERIC abstracts. For example, the abstractor intended to say the data "imply" something and instead says the data "infer" something. When such a situation is detected, the Facility should replace the incorrect word with the correct word. The Facility will, of course, only take this type of action when absolutely certain about the validity of the change and when it is clearly supportable in the standard authorities.

19. Ungrammatical Sentences (Creating Problems With Meaning)

Lengthy sentences, with poor connectives and other grammatical faults, may make it difficult if not impossible to understand what was meant. If the Facility editors cannot, after repeated readings, understand a given sentence, they may assume that the user would have the same problem. Such a sentence should be re-structured so that its meaning is clearer. It may be necessary to contact the Clearinghouse in order to accomplish this, but such contact is not mandatory. The objective should be to make the meaning clear without the addition or deletion of any information.

---

[3]Note: Roman numerals are acceptable, however, when being used to describe something that is clearly identified in the source by Roman (e.g., Title IX") rather than Arabic numerals and when conversion to Arabic might result in confusion for the user.

20. Grammar/Usage Problems

The English language has many rules of grammar. Some are widely observed. Some are widely ignored. Those that affect the meaning of the statement being made are the easiest to justify and tend to be the most widely accepted. Those that are the most subtle, but do not affect meaning (or jar the ear), tend to be the most ignored.

The Facility editors should be on the alert primarily for those violations of the rules of grammar that affect the meaning of what is being said. An example of a rule that can affect meaning is to place the word "only" as close as possible and preceding the word it modifies, e.g., "He ate only a sandwich," *not* "He only ate a sandwich." Examples of rules that do not affect meaning are:

- the dying distinction between "shall" and " will";
- the subtle distinction between "because of" and "due to"; and
- the split infinitive (often awkward, but sometimes justified).

Grammar or usage problems detected that adversely affect the meaning of what is being said in an abstract should be corrected by the Facility editors. Usages that are widely regarded by the authorities as unacceptable should also be corrected. However, usages that do not affect meaning, that do not jar the ear, and that have some reasonable constituency (e.g., *American Heritage Dictionary* Usage Panel vote of 15% acceptability or above), should simply be left alone.

21. Punctuation

There are certain well-accepted rules of punctuation about which there is little or no disagreement, e.g.:

- a question is followed by a question mark;
- a colon precedes a list;
- a possessive requires an apostrophe;
- in the structure "A, B, and C " there should be a comma after B if three distinct entities are intended; and
- titles of written works, including conference papers and chapter titles, are enclosed in quotation marks (the underline not being available.)

When such standard rules of punctuation, verifiable in the authorities, are violated, the Facility editors should correct the error.

There are other areas of punctuation that are less clear-cut and where personal preference may determine the punctuation used, e.g.:

- use of a semicolon in lieu of a period to separate two conceptually-related sentences;
- use of a comma after a phrase within a longer sentence, to indicate a "breathing space";
- eliding or not eliding dates, (e.g., "1980-1982" or "1980-82"); and
- use of a hyphen to relate more closely two words that could just as well be separated (e.g., problem-solving/ problem solving; free-form/free form)[4]

[4] NOTE: But see Chicago "Compound Words," 6.24-31.

In these more "optional" areas, where either form used is "correct," the Facility editors should not intrude their preferences, but should go with whatever the author or Clearinghouse abstractor wrote, *as long as consistency is maintained within a given abstract*. As with numbers and capitalization, punctuation matters have little or no effect on computerized retrieval.

22. Capitalization

There are commonly accepted capitalization rules that should be adhered to, e.g.:

- months of the year are capitalized;
- seasons of the year are *not* capitalized;
- names of specific entities are capitalized (Valium drug, Helvetica type, Dental Students Attitudes' Test, Project OSIRIS); and
- "west coast" is *not* capitalized.

The *GPO Style Manual* and the Chicago *Manual of Style* agree on most of the rules for capitalization, but there are significant differences[5]. When standard rules of capitalization (as contained in *either* of the two principal authorities used by ERIC) are violated, the Facility editors should correct the error. Capitalization practices that can be supported by either authority should be permitted to stand.

[5] NOTE: ERIC lower cases *all* articles, conjunctions, and prepositions in a title (unless they are the first or last word of the title), in accordance with Chicago 7.123), whereas GPO (3.52) capitalizes 4-character prepositions (such as "with").

POSTSCRIPT

The following quotations were assembled by Robert Collison and appear at various places in his book *Abstracts and Abstracting Services*. They are repeated here, with attribution, for the insight they can provide into the art of abstracting.

Since no one has ever defined a good abstract, the future of abstracting, professional or amateur, seems assured.

...L. Vanby

Abstracts were, of course, strongly opposed by those who felt that if God had intended them to publish abstracts they would not have published full papers in the first place.

...Derek de Solla Price

Abstracts provide the capability to concentrate within a single publication knowledge that is recorded in a multitude of research papers and technical reports.

..Irving M. Klempner

The abstract was described as a method devised several centuries ago to cope with excessive publication. It is no longer able to cope...

...Mary L. Tompkins

Abstracts rarely give the exact information the reader wants to know.

...Marian P. Anderson

The automatic abstracts derivable by present techniques require human editing to achieve adequate communicability.

...System Development Corporation

The production of an abstract journal seems to be a continuing fight against error.

...Charles L. Bernier

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